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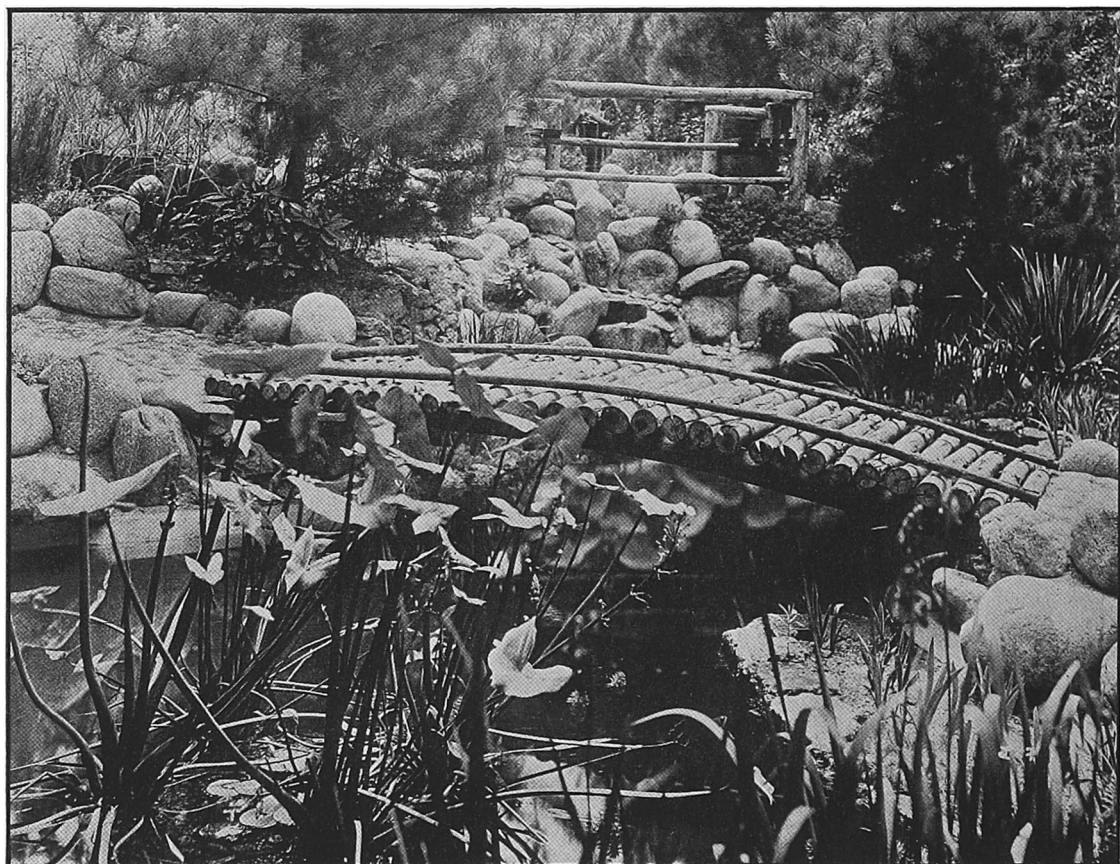
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ARCHED GARDEN BRIDGE OF POLES—STONE STEPS LEADING UP TO GARDEN SEATS BEYOND

JAPANESE GARDENS IN AMERICA

BY CHARLES ALMA BYERS

Illustrated by views from the garden of Mr. G. B. Rivers, near Los Angeles, California.

IN considering Japanese gardens, it is well to remember that the population of Japan is very dense, and that the consequent necessary conservation of land area causes the garden plot to be both highly prized and quite limited as to size. Hence, in the first place, the garden owner in Japan has learned to appreciate to the fullest such opportunities as have been accorded him, and, in the second place, the landscape gardener in that country has been ably schooled in economy and condensation. That most interesting creations have resulted is readily apparent to all who visit the Flowery Kingdom.

The ambition of the average Japanese, in respect to his home, is to some time become the owner of a bit of earth, that he may create for himself a garden. If that ambition has been realized, he is proud, indeed; he feels that he is a sort of aristocrat. And it is in his garden, instead of within the four walls of his house, that he ordinarily prefers to receive his friends. It is there that, in his leisure, he is usually to be found, enjoying its beauty and profiting from its health-sustaining breezes. It is also there, in its quietude, that he meditates; that he and his family virtually live. It, in truth, exemplifies his home instinct. Herein lies much for Americans to ponder.

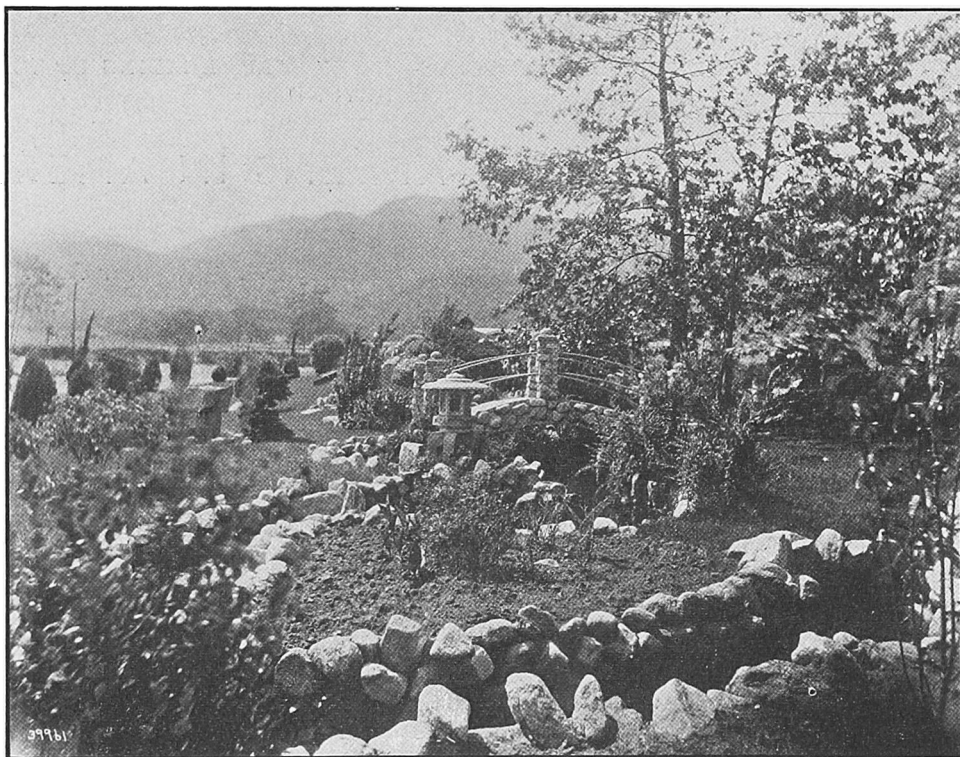
Because he is usually limited in the matter of area, the Japanese landscape gardener, from long schooling, has learned well, especially, the secret of condensation. Belying the fact that they are commonly actually small, his creations appear spacious—surprisingly so, proportionately. His every square foot of space is utilized—not haphazardly, as is often the case with respect to gardening in America, but fittingly, thoughtfully. There is nothing that seems a mere “fill-in,” but his every garden detail comprises an apparently necessary part of the symmetrically arranged whole. Studied in its entirety or dissected into details, therein is nothing that impresses one as being without legitimate purpose. Yet, it must not be inferred that every square foot is utilized in the general meaning of the term, for that would mean either a cluttered or a crowded appearance. There are open spaces, but they are made to constitute an actual feature of the general scheme—to produce the proper vista effects, and to contribute to that prevailing deception of spaciousness.

In primary conception, a Japanese garden is a reproduction in miniature of a natural Japanese landscape—a sort of composite reproduction, perhaps. It, however, is probably best described as a condensation or embodiment of a natural land-



DIFFERENT TYPES OF
JAPANESE GARDEN
LANTERNS.
CONSTRUCTED OF
ARTIFICIAL STONE AND
PLACED BESIDE A
GARDEN LAKE

WHERE THE GARDEN
VERGES INTO THE OPEN—
AN ARCHED BRIDGE AND
A GARDEN LANTERN
ARE SHOWN



scape's soul. It is picturesquely wild and natural, yet it is readily recognized as being of man's making. The Japanese gardener goes to Nature for inspiration, but instead of becoming her slave he sets about to make himself Nature's master, yet not without manifestation of reverence. He distorts Nature's plants into fantastic shapes and dwarfs them almost beyond recognition, and he reduces mountains, hills, valleys, lakes and streams

to mere pigmies; but he does all this with such wonderful skill and ability, and with such conscientiousness, understanding, and clear perception of proportions, as to make the result seem only natural. To dwarf, to condense, and yet retain proportion and naturalness, is, in truth, his first aim.

An interesting and always important characterizing phase of the Japanese garden is its

topography. Since it is a select bit of landscape, done in miniature, the garden invariably possesses, as its basis, an irregular arrangement of hills and valleys, lakes and streams, and here and there outcroppings of rock. These will be placed with no apparent idea of order, but, nevertheless, their relative positions represent careful study and contribute effectually toward accomplishing a certain result. The hills and valleys will be of irregular contour, the lakes irregularly shaped, the streams naturally coursed and both lakes and streams usually edged in seeming hit and miss fashion with rough stones and boulders. To this extent, Nature is quite consistently copied, though dwarfed.

This laying-out, however, represents only the first stage in the garden's creation. Next comes the purely artificial. Artificial stone lanterns, of odd appearance but characteristically Japanese, are set up; gracefully arched bridges, of either stone or rustic timbers, are erected over the streams, at certain predetermined places; zigzagging or sinuously winding walks and short flights of rough stone steps are provided to form the desirable connections, and occasionally, beside a stream or lake, or in some other convenient spot, will be created a secluded or view-commanding garden seat, perhaps constructed of a few well-placed stones. Somewhere, in the arrangement, there also will probably be a tea-house of some kind.

Although copied Nature and the purely artificial, represented by topography and the furnishing accessories, respectively, are more or less blended together, it is by the garden's planting—its trees, shrubbery, and so forth—that these two opposites are actually effectually linked together. If the garden is of sufficient extent, the original growth of trees—if it possess such—will probably be utilized, by thinning out the ones that can not be harmonized into the scheme. Then there will be added other lower-growing shrubbery, largely of dwarfed varieties; some of these will be set to appear as if springing from the very rock-formations. There will also be water-lilies, and, of course, the Japanese irises, as well as other flower-producing plants. The real Japanese garden, however, is in no sense a riotous display of rare plant-life cultivated for sake of rarity or for gaudiness of colors. Instead, it presents a study in simple symmetry, wherein each single feature of the plan is definitely related to the whole.

Japanese gardens, in the last few years, have become quite common in America, particularly on the Pacific Coast, and are fast becoming more so. In some cases, they have been very intelligently interpreted here, but it is doubtful if the real spirit, the basic idea, of the garden of Japan is, to any appreciable extent, understood. We have borrowed the type, without its soul; and we have borrowed it mainly in order that we may have "something different," something for show. Moreover, we have frequently made them even smaller "miniature landscapes" than they commonly are in Japan, yet here we are less crowded for room. Not all gardens in Japan are miniature in proportion. Some of them, notably certain famous ones in Tokio, are quite extensive, even as compared with our better appointed gardens in America; and at same time they consistently portray and embody the country's conception of a beautiful garden, in fact, exemplify it at its best.

Naturally, in transplanting it here, the Japanese

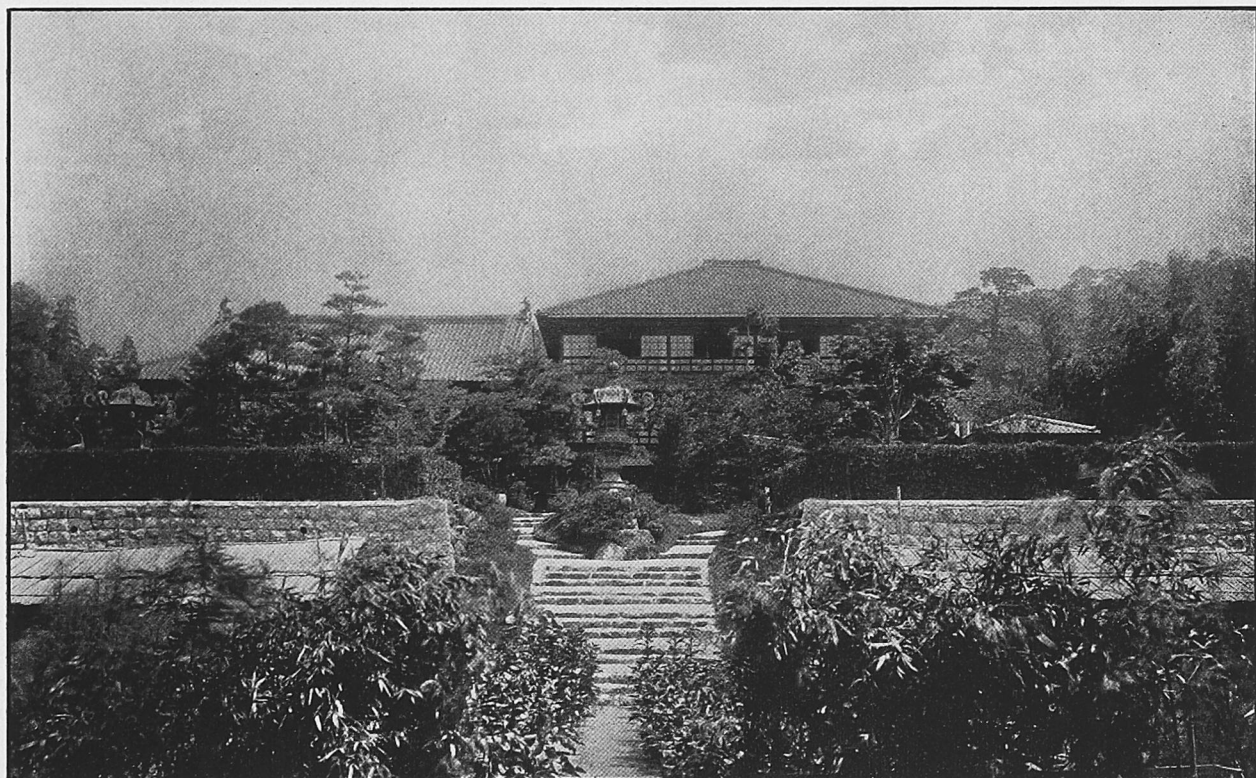
garden in America must be somewhat modified. Difference in climate and difference in suitable plants and shrubbery make at least slight changes necessary. We may also find ways for making it better adapted to our mode of living. However, its native distinctiveness, which is especially pronounced, should not be destroyed, and not more than slightly interfered with. And, above all, its



JAPANESE GARDEN TEA-HOUSE; CONSTRUCTED AND FURNISHED IN RUSTIC STYLE

spirit should be grasped and retained.

There is much that Americans can learn from Japanese gardens. They teach simplicity and directness of purpose. They seem, on first acquaintance, rather bizarre, even grotesque, but, known better, they become a bit of man-made Nature—like a landscape plot that had always existed. It was a child of the Occident on a visit to the Orient that surmised that a certain one in Tokio "must be fairyland," but couldn't understand what had become of the dwarfs and fairies about which the story-book had told. But aside from the æsthetic phase, Japanese gardens teach us something still more important—practicability. They are made to be lived in, to induce one to come out and stay out in the open. They invite enjoyment of their restfulness and peacefulness, rather than mere cursory glances or an occasional brief visit to inspect some rare flower. They are also places for meditation, for holding self-communion, as well as for entertaining one's friends.

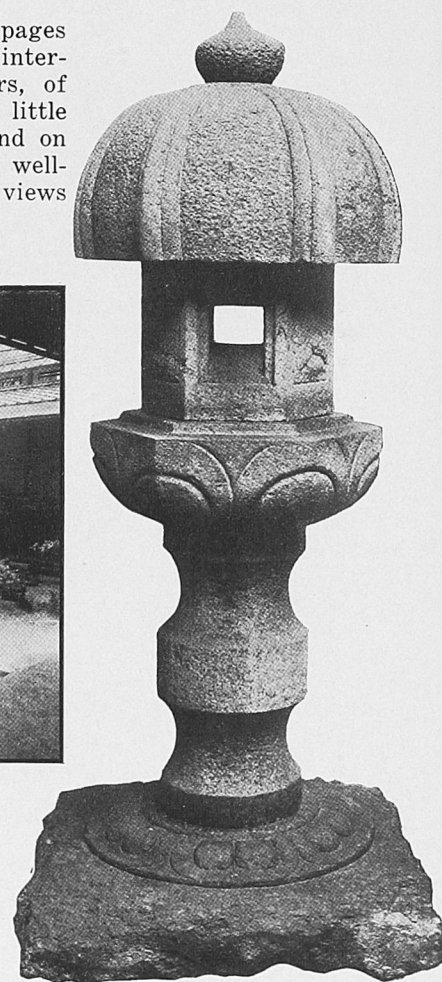


GARDEN OF YAMANAKA GALLERIES, KYOTO, JAPAN

THE illustrations on the three preceding pages show a Japanese garden of American interpretation, owned by Mr. G. B. Rivers, of near Los Angeles, California. It is quite a little larger than most gardens in this country and on the whole is an exceptionally consistent and well-handled representation. We are also giving views of gardens in Kyoto, Japan.



VIEW OF YAMANAKA GARDENS

JAPANESE
LANTERNS"MIKAGE"
STONE